To His Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough, and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day;  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood;  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires, and more slow.  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;  
Two hundred to adore each breast,  
But thirty thousand to the rest;  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For, lady, you deserve this state,  
Nor would I love at lower rate.  
  
        But at my back I always hear  
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found,  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long preserv'd virginity,  
And your quaint honour turn to dust,  
And into ashes all my lust.  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none I think do there embrace.  
  
        Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may;  
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour,  
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.  
Let us roll all our strength, and all  
Our sweetness, up into one ball;  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life.  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

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Explication of “To His Coy Mistress”

Sensual acts have been a popular subject in writing since man had first begun to put words down on paper. It was considered taboo to write ‘out-and-out’ about intercourse in popular literature and so, writers aware of this fact, found ways to appropriately and sensibly discuss sensual activities. Other writers, such as Andrew Marvell, were more upfront when talking about subjects of a sexual nature. In Marvell’s poem “To His Coy Mistress”, the narrator is being more open with his intentions because he feels that both his and his lover’s youth and beauty are fading. The speaker in this poem considers time to be of the essence so sensibility must be sacrificed. “To His Coy Mistress” uses imagery, forms of figurative language, and rhyme to show how men often rush their lovers into sensual acts.

Imagery is a device that is capable of entertaining a reader’s literary senses. Imagery allows the narrator to effectively and quickly portray his views and ideas. For example, time is running out for the speaker and his lover, so the narrator tells his lover he can feel “[t]ime’s wingèd chariot drawing near” (22). The speaker, a young lover, wants to have sensual relations with his beloved since time is running short in his eyes. He wants to portray to her the sense of urgency that he feels. The speaker also tells her that “all [his] lust” will turn “into ashes” (30). Also, the narrator wishes to vividly depict how his desire for his lover will burn and die if they wait to engage in sensual acts. This young man is in the prime of his life and wants to be intimate now--to achieve his goal, he must vibrantly describe his feelings so that his lover will acquiesce to his request. Imagery is an appropriate choice for “To His Coy Mistress” because the narrator does not want to waste any time.

Other literary devices incorporated into “To His Coy Mistress” are simile and metonymy. The use of these literary tools allows the young man to hell his lover what he wants and thinking without coming right out and saying what is on his mind.

. The narrator, however, is not completely cryptic in his message since he does not have the time to be so polite. Instead, he uses figures of speech to be direct without saying exactly what he means. The narrator tells his lover a youthful glow rests on her skin like the “morning dew” (34). This simile functions on many different levels, for instance: at first read it appears as though the speaker is complementing his lover in order to get her to agree to sensual activity. Moreover, the statement actually functions as a reminder of the quickly fading time; dew does not stay on the grass for long, it evaporates very quickly. The narrator also tries to expedite sexual relations by telling his lover: “Thus, though we cannot make our sun/ Stand still” (45-46). The narrator uses “sun” as a metonymy for days. The two lovers are unable to stop time. If they speaker could slow the passing of the days he would spend more time courting his lover. Because their days are numbered, the lovers must make the most of their time by being engaging in physical relation. This is his closing argument and last attempt to get his lover to see their situation from his perspective.

The narrator of “To His Coy Mistress” also utilizes rhyme. The narrator uses this literaery device to give a song-like to his plea. He is addressing his beloved, and so the speaker uses rhyme to maintain a sweet and loving tone even if his message is not so innocent. The narrator tells his lover he could spend “[t]wo hundred [years] to adore each breast, / But thirty thousand to the rest” (15-16). The masculine rhyme of “breast” and “rest” brings about a lyrical sound with the praising of this woman’s body. The speaker’s mission to rush his lover to engage in sensual activities is revealed when he says: “[t]he grave’s a fine and private place, / But none, I think, do there embrace” (31-32). This slant rhyme is appropriate to accompany a sardonic statement. An approximate rhyme, which is not as crisp as the narrator’s masculine rhymes, is used in these two lines because they fall in the section of the poem where the speaker is trying to speed up his lover’s decision.

The use of literary devices in “To His Coy Mistress” allows the speaker to pressure his lover. Marvell’s use of imagery, figurative language, and rhyme is used as a vehicle for his primary agenda—a profession of love to coerce his beloved. Men often rush their lovers into sensual activities; “To His Coy Mistress” is a prime example of such a situation. The poem is relevant because men today still try to rush their lovers into sensual acts. Due to his use of literary devices, Marvell’s words are still relevant.

Work Cited

Marvell, Andrew. "To His Coy Mistress." *Perrine' Literature*. Eds. Thomas R. Arp and Greg

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